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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

IPS by APZ

March 31, 1977

PARTICIPANTS: Dr. Jose Luis de Imaz, Prof. of Political Science,
 Catholic University, Buenos Aires
 Patricia Derian, D/HA
 Fernando Rondon, ARA/ECA
 James Buchanan, POL, Ambassador Buenos Aires

PLACE: U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires

DISTRIBUTION: Ambassador Hill

Prof. Imaz is a widely known and respected scholar, and a man quite obviously troubled by Argentina's human rights situation. He has had students and otherwise personally known several individuals who have been killed for alleged or actual terrorist activities. His evaluation of the current security environment was apparent in his response to a request that he participate in a television panel organized to discuss the first year of military government. Imaz stated that he had wanted to appear and advocate specific human rights improvements, but he decided to decline the invitation because his wife is soon to have a child and he did not want his house bombed.

On U.S. Foreign Policy in General

Imaz clearly finds the early foreign policy initiatives of the Carter administration disturbing. He identified the moral core of President Carter's policies as the reemergence of an impulse that had previously surfaced during the presidencies of W. Wilson and F.D. Roosevelt. Prof. Imaz further indicated that Americans were making a mistake by attempting to project and apply internationally the attitudes and sentiments evoked by their own domestic experiences. He suggested, for example, that a "WASP" (used in descriptive rather than derogatory sense) is ill prepared to understand the phenomenon of Argentine terrorism.

In criticizing the actions of the Carter administration, Prof. Imaz pointed to the US failure to specifically and publicly refute charges concerning CIA payments to former Chilean president and PDC (Christian Democratic Party) leader L. Frei. He maintains that US silence served to strengthen the military government, encouraged Pinochet's banning of traditional political parties, and will ultimately push the Chilean electorate further to the left because moderates like Frei and the PDC will be discredited.

Finally in terms of general comments, Imaz said he had written a piece for the political review Carta Politica in which he predicted that four years of the Carter administration's foreign policy would result in five or six more countries going communist, three or four more countries oriented toward Moscow, and stronger Social Democratic parties throughout Europe. (Comment: Imaz gave no explanation of exactly why this would all come to

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pass, although he apparently believes that the present US policies will alienate erstwhile friends and/or neutrals.)

On US-Argentine Relations

In brief, Imaz believes that the US is pursuing the right ends with the wrong tactics. He emphasized the uniqueness of Argentina's situation, the importance that Argentines attach to honor and dignity as against pragmatism, and the sensitivity of Argentines to what he characterized as intervention in the nation's internal affairs. Imaz stated that the US was fortunate that President Videla was not more of a political animal. If he were, according to Imaz, he would have exploited the cut in military credits to whip up nationalistic support for his government. Imaz stated that he would have taken advantage of the incident had he been president and referred to the nationalistic reaction evoked by Braden's "Blue Book" in 1946. In the case of further US sanctions, Imaz feels that public pressure will force the Argentine government into a more strident, nationalistic response.

Prof. Imaz insists that the key to human rights improvements is more pressure from the Church. It is the Church, he maintains, that has the authority to move the government toward compliance with Christian standards of conduct.

Many in the military government, he indicated, think less in terms of "rights" than in terms of "duties." He seemed to agree with the proposition that Argentina cannot recover as a society until Argentines display an historically uncharacteristic willingness to accept their duties as citizens.

On Fighting Communism

When asked about the best way to combat communism, Prof. Imaz stated that it was a spiritual matter, a matter of "faith." In the modern world, he contends, only the Arabs have a sufficiently strong faith to resist subversion by communism.

On Young People and Terrorists

Imaz referred to several young friends of his who have died as terrorists. He described them as model students and individuals and strong Catholics whom he had adored. He did not pursue the question of how they became involved in terrorism, but agreed that there is at least a superficially logical, but not inevitable, progression from committed Catholic Youth leader to Third World church activities, and finally to some type of terrorist involvement.

As for the Montoneros who remain active, Imaz suggested that they are consciously involved in a process of physical self-destruction. He

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contends that as a result of their Catholic background they are simply awaiting their time to die.

He does not see a terrorist threat in today's new university students. They appear uninterested in the kind of political activism that stirred many of their predecessors, although this might be only a transitory situation.

On Women in Argentina

Responding to a question on the status of women in Argentine society, Prof. Imaz first noted that foreign ideas do not play well in Argentina and suggested that women do well in the professions here anyway. He cited as an example the fact that several of the university faculties in Buenos Aires are over 50% female.

Imaz emphasized that Argentine women feel a strong emotional need for male support and companionship. Nonetheless, he stated that the trend among young people in Argentina is increasingly toward female domination.

Ms. Derian's Comments

Ms. Derian's remarks were mainly responses to points raised by Prof. Imaz, and they were directed at explaining the roots and purposes of US policy on human rights and the ability of non-Argentines to understand the Argentine situation.

More specifically, Ms. Derian explained why the US does not perceive its human rights initiatives as interference in the internal affairs of other nations. She also discussed at length the practical and moral disadvantages of fighting terrorist violence with officially-sanctioned terrorism. After discussing some of her own experiences with tactics used effectively in the US civil rights movement, Ms. Derian suggested that the Argentine government could rally considerable popular support by terminating the counterterrorist abuses and fighting the terrorists with the rule of law.

Ms. Derian acknowledged that Argentina's problems are highly complex and not susceptible to easy solutions, but she pointed out that this does not necessarily mean that the situation cannot be understood by outside observers. She suggested that when you place what is happening in Argentina in the broader context of human experience, it becomes possible to understand the hatred, the emotions, the personal antagonisms that the battle here has engendered.

On the question of tactics, Ms. Derian acknowledged that some errors have been made in the early days of the new administration, but she emphasized that they stemmed not from bad intentions nor lack of ability but from the enormous difficulty of working out the instrumentalities of a policy aimed

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at improving human rights performance on a global scale. Despite the difficulties, Ms. Derian continued, the depth and sincerity of US commitment on this issue are beyond question, and the search for viable and effective methods will continue.

Comment on Prof. Imaz' Statements

Imaz' remarks were quite restrained. There was no passionate advocacy of one position or another, and when Ms. Derian countered some of his comments, he often said he agreed with her even though his own comments had indicated quite the contrary. His reluctance to engage in a more pointed debate may reflect a deferential attitude toward women and/or a lack of clarity in his own thinking about a complex problem in which he has a deep emotional involvement.

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